

Egyptian Religion

Prepare to Read

Objectives

In this section you will

1. Learn about Egyptian gods and goddesses.
2. Find out about the Egyptians' belief in the afterlife.
3. Discover how and why the pharaohs' tombs were built.

Taking Notes

As you read, take notes to summarize the religious beliefs and practices of the ancient Egyptians. Copy the chart below, and use it to record your notes.

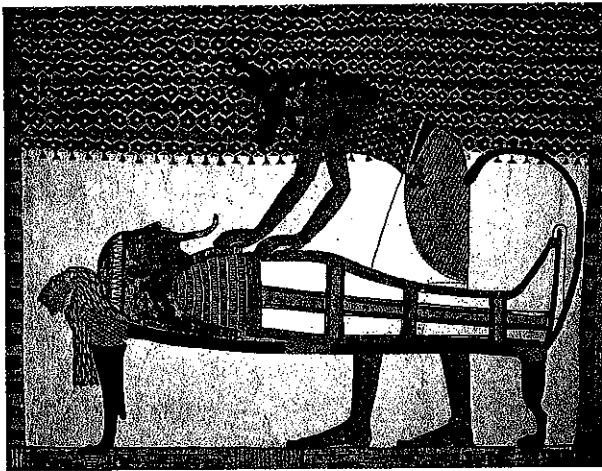
Egyptian Religion		
Beliefs	Practices	Pyramids
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Target Reading Skill

Use Context Clues When reading, you may find a word that is unfamiliar or even a word you know that is used in an unfamiliar way. Look for clues in the surrounding words and sentences, to help you understand the meaning of the word. For example, look at the context for the word *linen* in the second paragraph on this page. Find the explanation of how linen was used in mummification. What do you think *linen* means?

Key Terms

- **afterlife** (AF tur lyf) *n.* a life after death
- **mummy** (MUM ee) *n.* a dead body preserved in lifelike condition
- **pyramid** (PIH ruh mid) *n.* a huge building with four sloping triangle-shaped sides; built as royal tombs in Egypt
- **Giza** (GEE zuh) *n.* an ancient Egyptian city; the site of the Great Pyramid



Anubis, god of the dead, tends a dead pharaoh. According to Egyptian myth, Anubis invented mummification.

As the royal family wept over the pharaoh's body, the priest chanted:

“You will live again. You will live forever. Behold, you will be young forever.”

—ancient Egyptian prayer

One hundred days had passed since the pharaoh had died. During that time, the royal officials had been carefully preparing his body. Now, they wrapped the body in many strips of fine linen and placed it in a gold-covered coffin decorated to resemble the king in all of his royal glory.

The Egyptians believed in an **afterlife**, a life after death. They said prayers during the funeral, hoping to help the pharaoh's soul on its way to the afterlife. Then the nobles and royal family followed the body as it was carried to the royal tomb. Workers closed the tomb and the mourners went home. The pharaoh's journey to the afterlife had begun.

Egyptian Gods and Goddesses

Religion was an important part of daily life in ancient Egypt. The Egyptians believed that their gods and goddesses controlled the workings of nature. They built temples to honor their gods, and offered them food, gifts, and prayers.

Regional Differences Early on, Egyptian towns had their own gods and goddesses with their own temples. These included gods who were often shown as humans with animal heads. All Egyptians also worshiped certain principal gods, such as the sun god, Re and the falcon god, Horus. Over time, however, all ancient Egyptians came to believe in several groups of gods.

Important Gods The chief god of the ancient Egyptians was Amon-Re (ah mun RAY). He protected the rich and the poor alike. The Egyptians believed that Amon-Re was born each morning in the east with the sunrise. Each evening he died in the west with the setting sun. That is why the desert area to the west was believed to be the home of the dead.

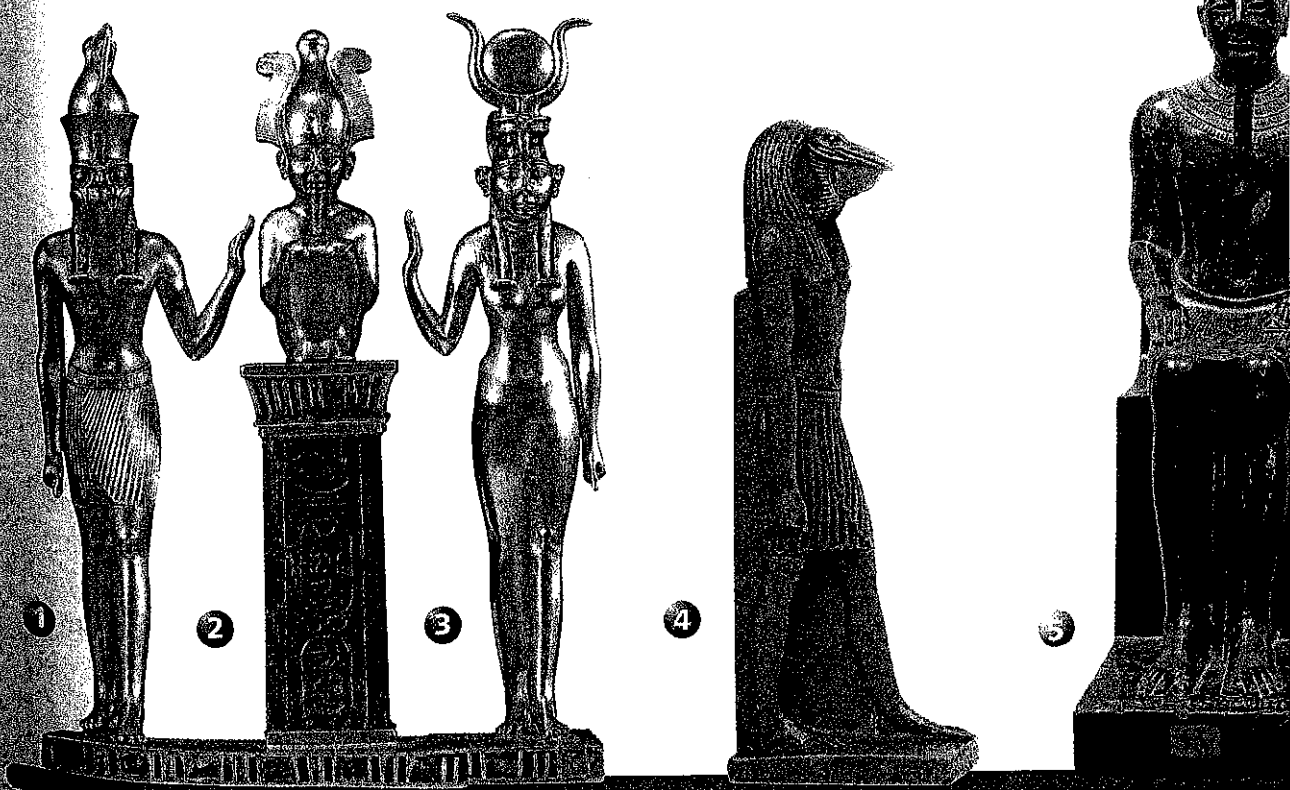
Other powerful gods included Osiris (oh SY ris), the god of the living and the dead. The goddess Isis (EYE sis) was his wife. She was worshiped as the great mother who protected her children. The sky god, Horus, was their son.

Reading Check Who was Osiris?

Egyptian Gods and Goddess

The ancient Egyptians believed their gods controlled life, death, and all of nature.

- ① Horus, the sky god and the god of kingship
- ② Osiris, the god of the afterlife
- ③ Isis, the goddess of women and children
- ④ Thoth, the god of wisdom and writing
- ⑤ Amon-Re, the sun god and god of creation



Links Across The World

A King With One God

Amenhotep IV (ah mun HOH tep) became pharaoh in 1379 B.C. Five years later, he changed his name to Akhenaton (ah keh NAH tun) to show his devotion to the god, Aton, the life-giving disk of the sun. Like the Israelites, Akhenaton worshiped only one god. He ordered workers to remove the names of other Egyptian gods from temples. Most Egyptians rejected the practice of monotheism. After the king's death, they went back to worshipping many gods.

Belief in an Afterlife

Like the people of many civilizations, the ancient Egyptians believed in life after death. Evidence of this belief is often found in the art and artifacts they left behind.

Journey to the Afterlife The ancient Egyptians believed the spirits of the dead made their way to the afterlife in heavenly boats. If they had pleased the gods in this world, they joined Osiris and lived a life of ease and pleasure. They spent their days eating, drinking, and visiting with friends and family members who had died. Because the souls of the dead could not survive without food, clothing, and other items from this life, their possessions were buried with them.

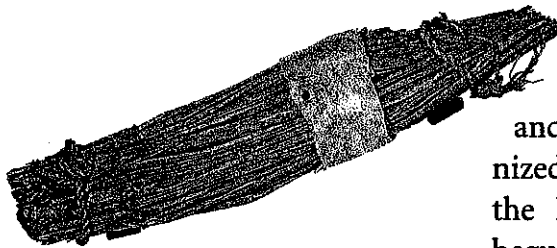
During the Old Kingdom, the afterlife was thought to be only for kings and their associates. But beginning in the Middle Kingdom, people of all classes looked forward to an afterlife.

Preparing the Dead Before the building of pyramids, most Egyptians were buried in the desert in shallow pits. Egypt's climate dried out a person's remains, creating a **mummy**, the preserved body of a dead person. According to religious beliefs, the soul would leave the mummy, but return to it to receive food offerings. The preserved appearance of the body allowed it to be recognized by the person's spirit. By the time of the Fourth Dynasty, the Egyptians had begun to practice mummification, artificially preserving the bodies before burial.

Mummification was expensive and took two or three months. Workers carefully removed the organs. The body was then filled with a natural salt and stored for about 40 days. During that time, it completely dried out. Once dry, the body was cleaned and bathed in spices. It was then wrapped with long linen bandages.

While workers were preparing the mummy, artisans were busy carving the coffin. Pharaohs actually had three or four coffins. The coffins nested one inside another like boxes. The innermost coffin was usually shaped like a human body, with the dead person's face painted on the cover.

✓ **Reading Check** Why did ancient Egyptians bury their dead with food and other possessions?



Burials, rich and poor

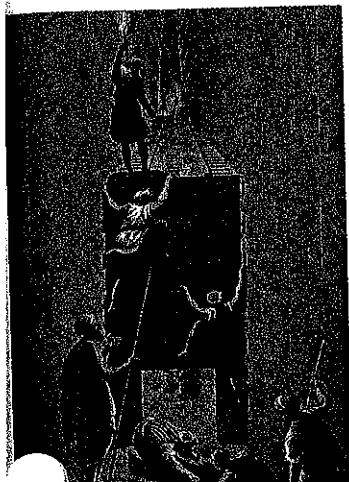
The decorative coffin on the right held the expensively preserved internal organs of King Tutankhamen. The reed coffin tied with rope (above), from about 1450 B.C., holds the naturally preserved body of a baby. **Infer** According to ancient Egyptian religious beliefs, which of the two souls would enjoy a more comfortable afterlife? Explain.





The Great Pyramid

For more than 4,000 years, the Great Pyramid at Giza stood taller than any other human-made structure in the world. About 480 feet (147 meters) high, it still stands today. It has four triangle-shaped sides and a square base.



Inside the Grand Gallery

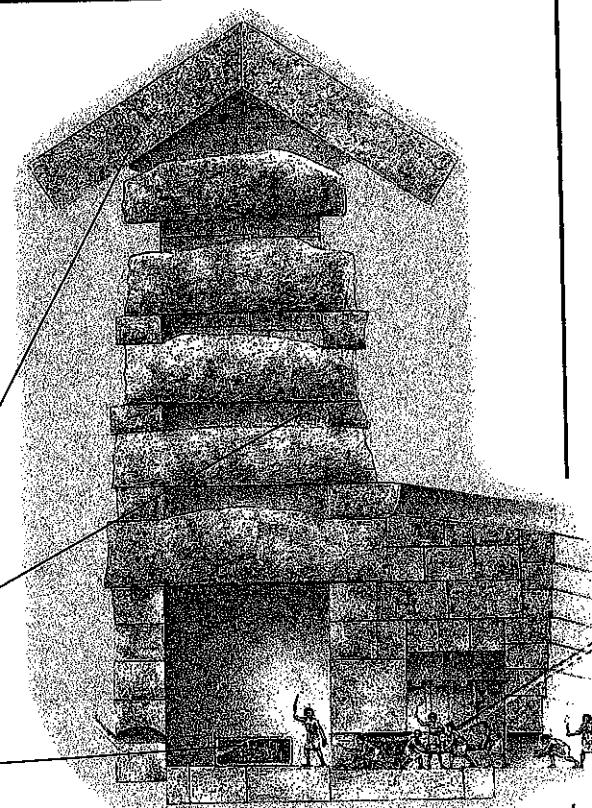
In the 1800s, Napoleon Bonaparte of France ordered a study of the pyramids. His scientists made drawings as they passed through the Grand Gallery to the King's Chamber.

The King's Chamber lay at the center of the pyramid.

These stones spread the weight of the pyramid above, preventing the whole structure from collapsing.

Graffiti carved into these slabs records the names of the workers who built the chamber.

The pharaoh's outer coffin is larger than the entrance to the chamber, meaning that the pyramid was built around it.

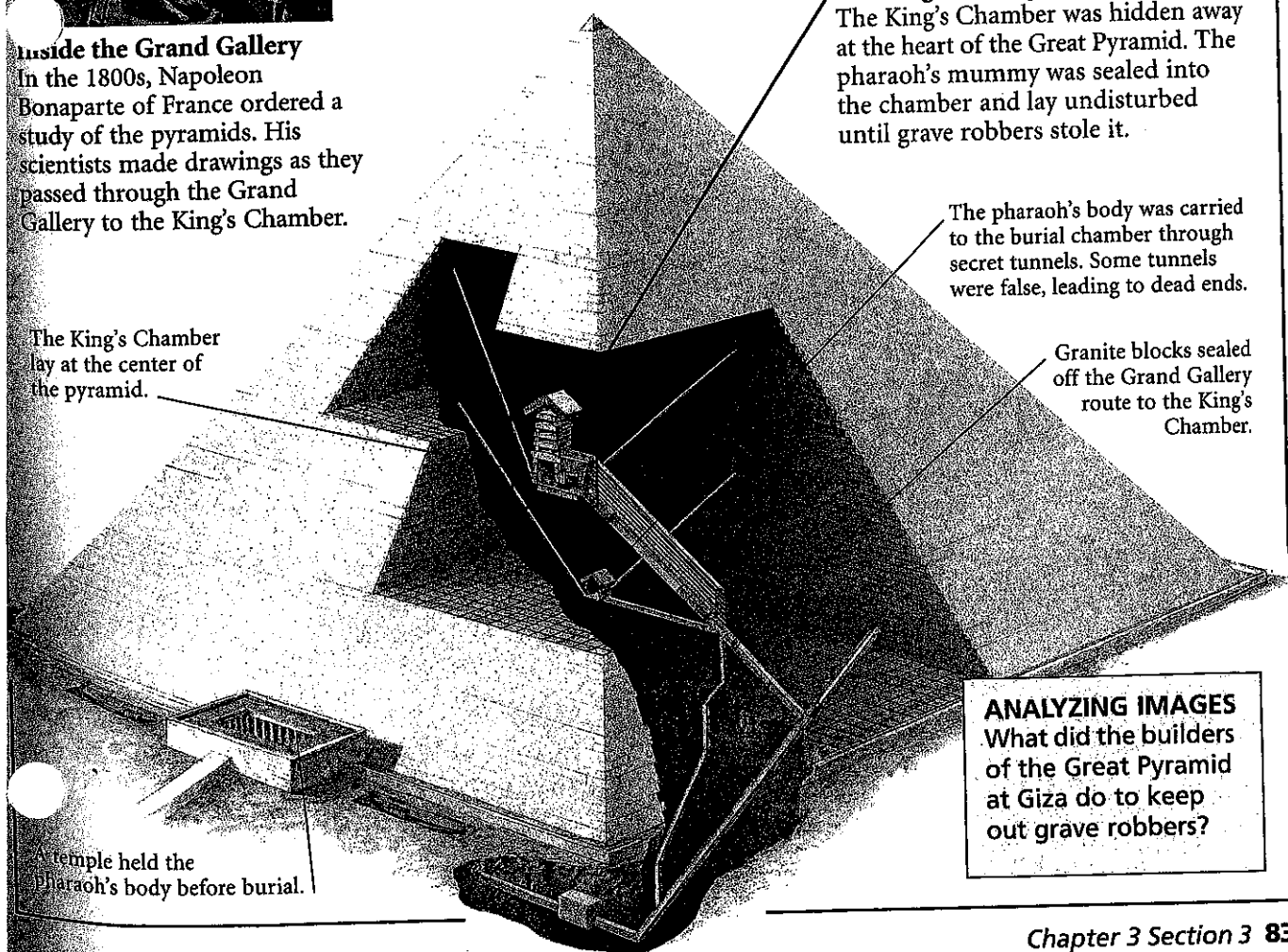


Building the King's Chamber

The King's Chamber was hidden away at the heart of the Great Pyramid. The pharaoh's mummy was sealed into the chamber and lay undisturbed until grave robbers stole it.

The pharaoh's body was carried to the burial chamber through secret tunnels. Some tunnels were false, leading to dead ends.

Granite blocks sealed off the Grand Gallery route to the King's Chamber.



ANALYZING IMAGES

What did the builders of the Great Pyramid at Giza do to keep out grave robbers?

The Pharaohs' Tombs

The planning for a pharaoh's tomb began soon after he was crowned. The earliest royal tombs were made of mud brick. As time went on, however, tomb building became a complex art.

The Pyramids The pharaohs of the Fourth Dynasty built the largest and most famous tombs. These were the **pyramids**, huge buildings with four sloping triangle-shaped sides. Most of the pyramids were built during the Old Kingdom. The largest is called the Great Pyramid, built for Khufu (KOO foo), the second king of the Fourth Dynasty. The Great Pyramid was built in the ancient city of Giza. Find Giza on the map at the beginning of this chapter.



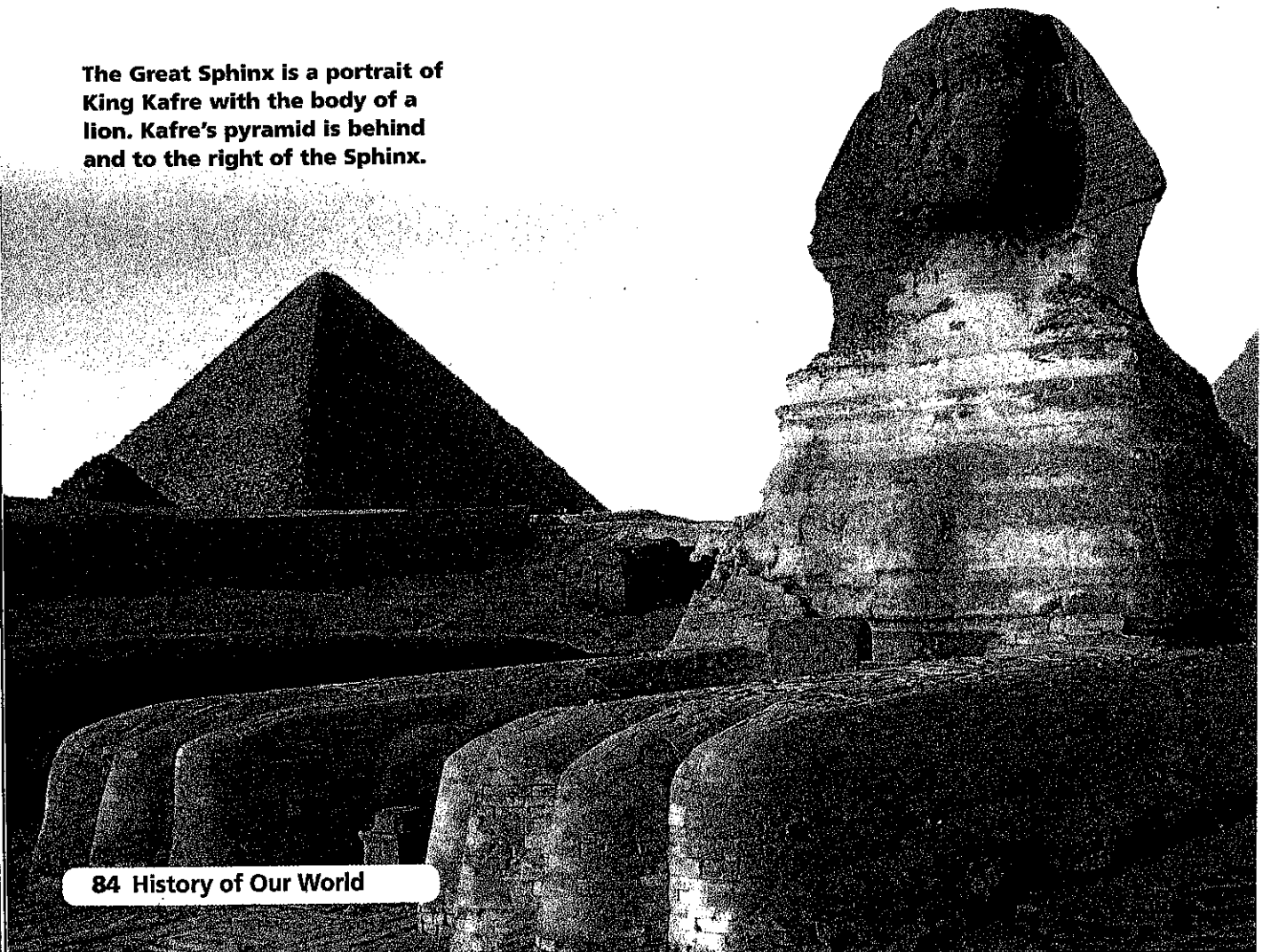
Using Context Clues

What does *hauled* mean?

Look for an explanation in the text under the heading The Building Process.

The Building Process Building the pyramids required a great deal of organization. The Great Pyramid is made up of more than 2 million stones. The average weight of each stone is 5,000 pounds (2,270 kilograms). Each stone had to be *hauled* up the side of the pyramid and put into its proper place.

The Great Sphinx is a portrait of King Katre with the body of a lion. Katre's pyramid is behind and to the right of the Sphinx.



A pyramid could take more than 20 years to build. The project began with the selection of a site on the west bank of the Nile. Remember that the west was thought to be the land of the dead. Once the site was chosen, workers cleared the ground. Engineers set the pyramid square so that the sides faced the main points of the compass—north, south, east, and west.

Workers then cut the building blocks. Stone for the inside of the pyramid came from nearby quarries. But fine stone for the outside came from farther away. Some stone came all the way from Nubia. It had to be loaded onto barges and carried to the building site either along the Nile or along canals near the Nile.

Teamwork To get the blocks of stone into place, workers used sleds, wooden rollers, and levers. They dragged and pushed the huge blocks up ramps of packed rubble to the level they were working on.

Building pyramids was dangerous work. Each year, men lost their lives, crushed by falling blocks. But the workers believed in the importance of their work. For them, building a pyramid was an act of faith. It was a way of ensuring the pharaoh's place in the afterlife.

✓ Reading Check Why did the Egyptians build pyramids?



Carpenters at work, from a painting in an official's tomb

Section 3 Assessment

Key Terms

Review the key terms at the beginning of this section. Use each term in a sentence that explains its meaning.

Target Reading Skill

Find the word *quarries* in the second paragraph of this page. What do you think it means?

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

(a) Identify What were the religious beliefs of the ancient Egyptians?

(b) Describe In what ways did the ancient Egyptians use religion to understand nature?

2. (a) Explain Why did the Egyptians mummify their dead?

(b) Analyze How do we know that the afterlife was important to the ancient Egyptians?

3. (a) Recall Why were the pharaohs concerned about the condition of their tombs?

(b) Sequence Describe how the ancient Egyptians organized the building of the pyramids.

Writing Activity

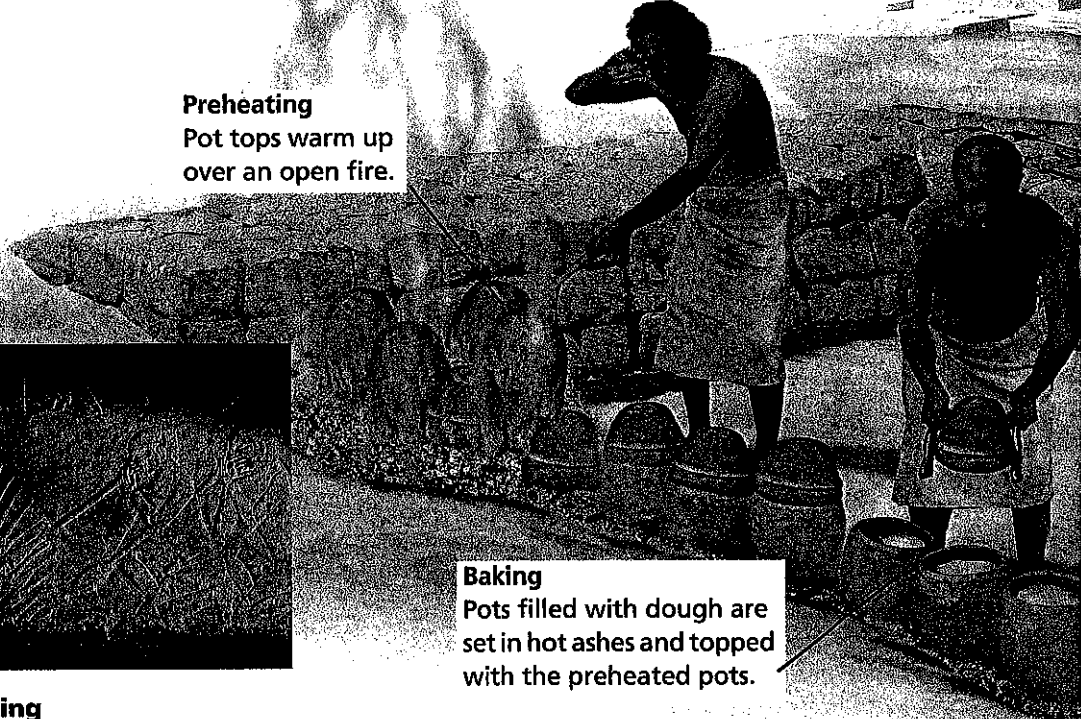
Suppose the pharaoh invites you to go with him to inspect his pyramid as it is being built. Write a journal entry describing what you see on your visit.

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Focus On The Pyramid Builders

In the shadow of the three pyramids at Giza, archaeologists are uncovering a lost city. It is the workers' city, a sprawling site on which as many as 20,000 men and women lived and worked about 4,500 years ago. The workers came from all over Egypt. They included pyramid builders and their bosses, administrators, priests, cooks, doctors, metalworkers, masons, weavers, and gravediggers. Laborers could be forced to work, but some probably volunteered to build the sacred tombs.



Preheating
Pot tops warm up over an open fire.

Baking
Pots filled with dough are set in hot ashes and topped with the preheated pots.

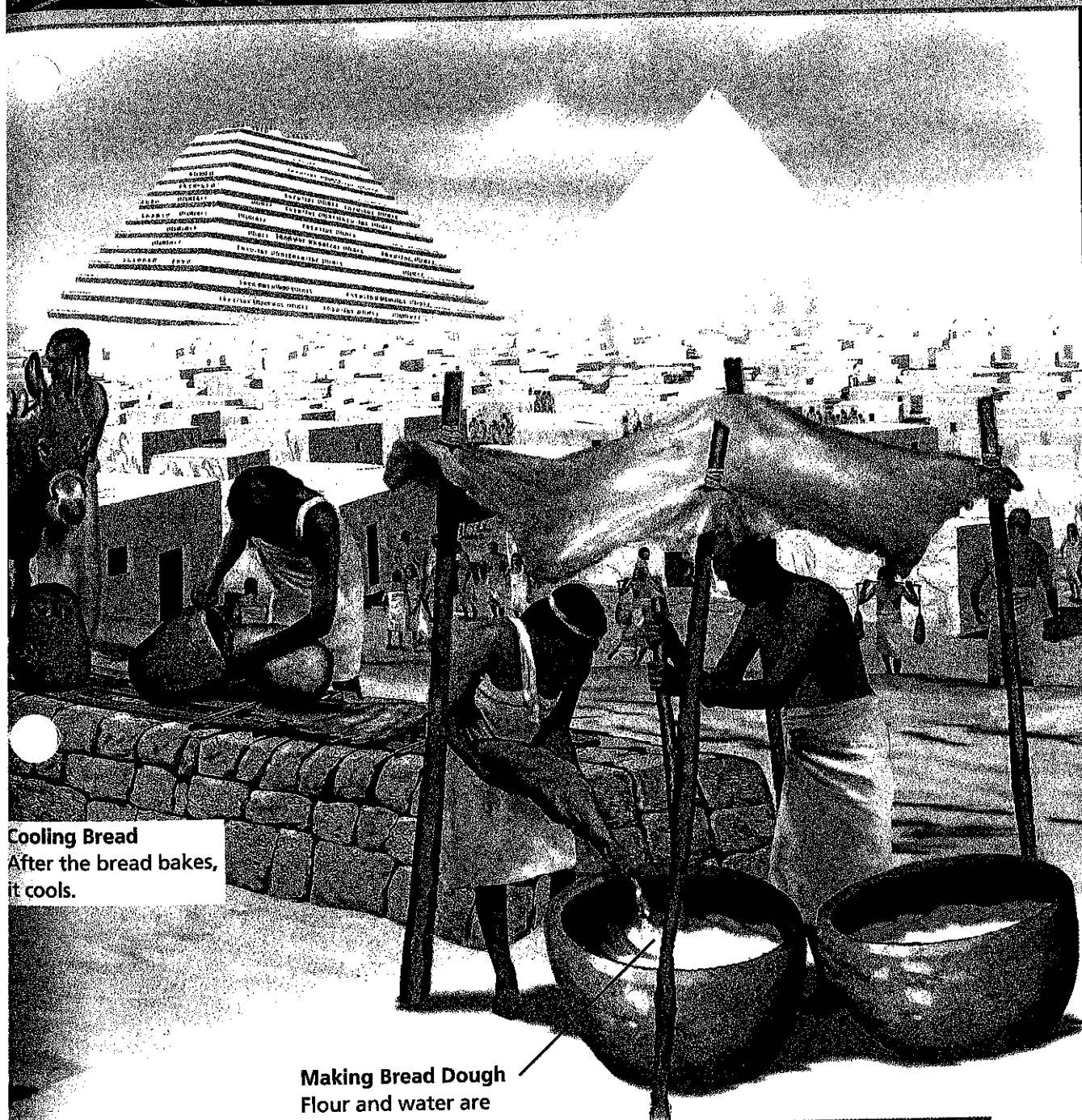


Copper Smelting

This carving shows workers blowing on flames to smelt copper, a process in which heat was used to remove impurities from the metal. Copper tools like the one shown at the top of this page were pounded into wedges to split rock.

An Ancient Bakery Without bread to feed the workers, the pyramids could not have been built. In the workers' city, bakers ground barley and wheat into flour for the bread dough. Wild airborne yeast helped the dough to rise. (The Egyptians, however, believed it rose by the power of the gods.) Workers set covered pots of dough onto a bed of hot ashes for baking. The finished loaves were heavy and filling—enough to feed a hungry pyramid builder.

The workers' site also included buildings for preparing meat and fish, to complete the workers' diet. There was one drawback to the bread-making process. Tiny pieces of the grain-grinding stones often wound up in the loaves, creating life-threatening dental diseases for the Egyptians.



Cooling Bread
After the bread bakes,
it cools.

Making Bread Dough
Flour and water are
mixed in a large terra-
cotta vat.

Assessment

Identify Who were the people who lived in the lost city near the pyramids at Giza?

Infer Why was a city of workers needed to build the pyramids?

Egyptian Medicine

In the workers' city, doctors set bones and treated a variety of ailments. Egyptians believed the household god Bes, whose statue is shown at the left, could protect them from danger.